

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**Put your knowledge to work
at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens**

*Volunteer 'docents' help nonprofit
inspire passion for high-altitude plants*

VAIL, Colo. (April 20, 2009) — Think you have what it takes to help showcase America's highest botanical garden?

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, in Vail's Ford Park, is looking this year to boost its legion of loyal volunteers, primarily those who generously donate their time and expertise leading public and private tours. All one needs to be a "docent," or guide, at the Gardens is some customer-service skills, a certain level of comfort speaking to small groups of people and a passion for our mountain environment. Of course, knowledge of gardening — specifically with native alpine plants — can greatly enrich the experience.

"I love the Gardens, and I love having fun with people, so the tours are very rewarding to me," says Juliana Maes, who's been volunteering as a docent at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens for four years. "My favorite groups are the ones that ask a lot of questions; that's when I give my best tours."

At 8,250 feet above sea level, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is the highest botanical garden in the United States, and perhaps the world, providing free access to an estimated 100,000 visitors annually. Its mission is to inspire passion for plants in high-altitude communities through beautification, conservation, education and research programs.

Memorial Weekend through Labor Day, Gardens Docents lead visitors on free, one-hour public tours of the Gardens, typically on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, starting at 10:30 a.m. Special arrangements can be made for private tours, such as for corporate groups, garden clubs and family gatherings. Visitors, from experts to novices, learn about the history of the Gardens, its collection of alpine flowers and plants and our mountain environment.

"I'm there to show them the basic principles of successful gardening," says Maes, a Colorado Master Gardener who runs her own business designing, installing and maintaining perennial gardens. "Some docents focus on the history of the Gardens, others on its exotic flowers. My tours are more about how you can grow a beautiful garden, too."

Last year, a core group of about two-dozen docents and other volunteers — ranging from gardening enthusiasts to Colorado Master Gardeners and Native Plant Masters — gave 44 public tours and 19 private tours, introducing an estimated one thousand people to Betty Ford Alpine Gardens.

“Why do we do it?” says Vail’s Gwen Scalpello, a Master Gardener who’s been managing the docent program since 2002. “It’s the love of the Gardens and the joy of sharing them with our guests.”

Recognized as the foremost authority on high-altitude plants in natural and cultivated landscapes in the Rocky Mountains, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens also contributes staff and expertise essential to conservation efforts throughout the region, providing an environment for rare, exotic and imperiled alpine wildflowers and plants. Organizations that have visited the Gardens include the International Plant Propagators Conference, the North American Rock Garden Society and other botanical gardens across the country and around the world.

Anyone interested in becoming a Gardens Docent — or volunteering, in general — at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is invited to attend the organization’s free annual Volunteers Spring Luncheon on Friday, April 24th, from noon to 2 p.m. at Lord Gore Restaurant, at Manor Vail in Vail Village. For more information, or to RSVP, call 970-476-0103, ext. 3.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for which operations and programs are funded entirely through the generosity of donors, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens also plays an important role in encouraging summertime flower displays throughout the Vail Valley at both private homes and businesses. For more information, visit www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org.

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Other volunteer opportunities at the Gardens

The Garden Docents program is one of several ways Betty Ford Alpine Gardens offers opportunities to get involved with the Vail Valley community, meet new people and learn more about gardening in our mountain environment.

Other programs, for which no experience is necessary, include:

- Volunteer gardening — gain hands-on experience through training workshops and actually working the Gardens on Monday, Thursday and Saturday mornings.
- The Schoolhouse and Alpine Treasures gift shops — Greet visitors, help raise money for the Gardens and learn Vail Valley history in a 1920s-era, one-room schoolhouse now maintained as a museum.
- Events — Help organize the Gardens’ annual fundraising and educational opportunities, such as the Spirit of Betty Ford Award, the Butterfly Launch for Eagle County third-graders, and the Annual Plant Sale.

- Membership Outreach — Help expand the Gardens' membership year-round by organizing and hosting neighborhood gatherings to present information about Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, its programs, and educational opportunities.
- Environmental Action — Join the Gardens' year-round Adopt-A-Rare-Plant project, a joint program with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program that identifies and monitors rare plants in Eagle County and provides valuable information for state conservation.
- Office Support — Help the Gardens year-round to maintain its database, label and catalogue plants, publish its newsletter, prepare bulk mailings and respond to phone and mail inquiries.

“We’re always in need of extra hands. Typically, it’s real simple stuff. You don’t have to be an expert gardener to have a huge impact at a critical time,” says Gardens Supervisor Melissa Kirr. “Volunteering is all about meeting friends, learning a new hobby, and getting some great exercise. And it’s more productive, and more fun, to work in a group.”

For more information, call 970-476-0103, ext. 3, or visit www.bettyfordalpinegardens.org.

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Note: Photos of the Betty Ford Alpine Gardens are available upon request — SLW.